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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 001868

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PROP](#) [CH](#)  
SUBJECT: 140 DEAD IN URUMQI RIOTS, DEATH TOLL MAY GO  
HIGHER, STATE MEDIA SAYS ORDER RESTORED

Classified By: Classified by Acting Political Minister Counselor  
Ben Moeling. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

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11. (C) During the course of July 6, China's official media steadily revised upward the death toll from July 5 rioting in Urumqi, Xinjiang, to 140. The Xinhua News Agency warned the final figure could be higher. 828 people were injured and police have made "hundreds" of arrests, the agency reported. Similar to the pattern of the March 2008 Tibet riots, Chinese officials placed blame for the unrest on outside "separatist forces." After news of the riots broke the evening of July 5, a political officer traveled to Urumqi the morning of July 16. He observed a heavy presence of both regular police (gongan) and People's Armed Police in riot gear. PolOff witnessed the detention of several Uighur men near the Uighur quarter of the city. Access to some Uighur areas of the city were blocked by police as of the late afternoon of July 6. Post issued a warden message to advise Amcits to avoid travel to Xinjiang. End Summary.

HUNDREDS ARRESTED

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12. (U) China's official media reported that 140 people died as a result of rioting July 5 in Urumqi, capital of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (XUAR). The Xinhua News Agency reported the afternoon of July 6 that the death toll was "still climbing." Earlier Xinhua reports stated that one People's Armed Police (PAP) officer was among the dead. 828 people were injured, according to Xinhua, and 203 shops and 14 homes were destroyed. Rioters also burned 261 vehicles, including 190 buses, 10 taxis, and two police cars, the agency said. Xinhua quoted a high-ranking XUAR police official saying that "hundreds" had been arrested including "at least a dozen" suspected of "fanning the unrest." Police were still searching for 90 "key suspects," the official told Xinhua. At 1300 July 6, Xinhua reported that order was partly restored in Urumqi, "but tension still exists in the city." The agency said police had set up several road blocks to prevent rioters from escaping.

"OUTSIDE FORCES TO BLAME"

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13. (U) On the morning of July 6, XUAR Chairman Nur Bekri made a televised statement on the riots. (Note: Nur Bekri is the equivalent of a provincial governor and is nominally the second highest official in the XUAR after Communist Party Secretary Wang Lequan. As of mid-afternoon July 6, Wang had not made any public statements.) Using rhetoric similar to that used by Tibet Autonomous Region officials following the March 14 Lhasa riots, Nur Bekri said the July 5 Urumqi riot was a premeditated and organized incident of "beating, smashing, looting, and arson" (da, za, qiang, shao) directed by the "three forces" ("sangu shili," i.e. separatism,

terrorism, and extremism) from abroad. The XUAR Chairman said overseas Uighur groups had exploited a June 26 incident at a toy factory in Shaoguan, Guangdong Province to foment unrest. (Note: According to media accounts, a brawl between ethnic Han and Uighur workers at the Guangdong factory left two Uighurs dead and 120 injured. )

HEAVY RIOT POLICE, PAP PRESENCE  
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¶4. (C) PolOff flew to Urumqi the morning of July 6, arriving in the early afternoon. Intermittent cell phone and blackberry service in Urumqi seemed to bear out anecdotal reports that the government was restricting mobile networks in areas of the city. PolOff reported a heavy presence of riot police (gong an) and PAP troops in Urumqi. At approximately 1400 on the afternoon of July 6, PolOff observed approximately 500 PAP troops carrying rifles and in full riot gear staging in central Urumqi, just north of the Grand Bazaar. Riot police were shouting at bystanders not to take photographs. PolOff observed that streets were largely quiet save for several ambulances. Police appeared to have blocked off a section of the Uighur quarter of the city near Jiefang Road, an area that state media described as a center of the rioting. In two separate places near Uighur neighborhoods, PolOff observed police rounding up Uighur men in their 20s and 30s. In both instances the police pushed the Uighur men to the ground, threatened to club them, and proceeded to lace their hands and march them off. Most Urumqi and Han residents with whom PolOff spoke cited the June 26 incident in Guangdong as sparking the riot. Several residents reported hearing gunfire the night of July 5 and

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had heard of numerous deaths. Uighurs asserted to PolOff that the deaths were the result of Han violence against Uighurs while Han residents, in turn, said the violence had been directed at them.

¶5. (U) China's media largely restricted itself to reprinting official news agency accounts of the violence in Urumqi. The website of Xinhua's English service provided more up-to-date and detailed accounts than Xinhua's Chinese service. On the Chinese language websites of Xinhua and People's Daily, stories about the Urumqi riot were placed far below "top stories" such as President Hu Jintao's trip to the G8 Summit in Italy and Premier Wen Jiabao's inspection tour of Shanxi Province. Commercial websites such as Baidu, however, treated the riot as the top news story of the day. The Urumqi violence was the lead story in China National Radio's (Zhongguo Renmin Guangbo Diantai) morning news cast. The radio report placed the blame for the riot on exile Uighur businesswoman Rebiya Kadeer and the World Uighur Congress. China Central Television (CCTV) ran video of bloodied Urumqi residents, burning busses, and rioters overturning a police car.

Embassy Issues Warden Message  
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¶6. (U) Embassy Beijing issued a warden message July 6 warning of unrest in Urumqi and advising Americans to defer travel to Xinjiang.

Comment  
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¶7. (C) The death toll from the Urumqi riot is already several times the 22 officially acknowledged deaths in the Lhasa riots of March 2008. Unlike in Tibet, when rioting quickly spread to other communities, Post has not heard reports of these riots spreading to other towns in Xinjiang. However, as Nur Bekri's remarks indicate, Communist Party leaders are again attempting to place the blame for this latest round of ethnic unrest on "outside forces" and showing no signs of examining underlying economic and social factors.

